

Study Guide for *Founders of Western Philosophy: Thales to Hume*

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Lecture One

- This course was given in the early 1970s. Do you think Dr. Peikoff's characterization of the modern world still rings true today?
- Other than those provided by Dr. Peikoff, do you see examples of Heraclitus's influence (general or specific) in today's world?
- Why does Dr. Peikoff call the battle between Heraclitus and Parmenides a "catastrophe in the making"?
- Do you see examples of the "package deals" referenced by Dr. Peikoff—ideas that do not rationally belong together—in today's world?
- Dr. Peikoff makes the case that the study of philosophy is different from the specialized sciences. Can you describe the subject matter of philosophy in contrast to some other field of study?
- Using your own concrete examples, can you explain why the questions of "change" and "multiplicity" were the starting points for Greek philosophy?
- How did the monism of the early Greeks influence the Pythagorean "solution" to the basic questions of Greek philosophy?
- Dr. Peikoff referred to the paradoxes of Zeno and suggested we think about an answer to them. Before you hear the answers given by later thinkers in Greece in future lectures, can you devise an answer to his claims that motion is impossible and that multiplicity is impossible?

Lecture Two

- Can you think of any modern examples of the sort of behavior endorsed by the Sophists?
- How do the sophists arrive at the argument for relativism in ethics? Why does this imply crude egoism?
- Describe the three types of philosophic school detailed in this lecture.
- Why does the atomic perspective in metaphysics imply a rejection of free will?

- What is the basis of the Socratic method? Why is it so valuable even to this day?
- What characteristics of Plato's philosophy make it the work of a great genius?
- Which of the four arguments for Plato's argument about universals and particulars do you find most compelling?
- What is the relationship between the world of forms and of particulars?
- How does Plato's myth of the demiurge lead to a denial of perfection?

Lecture Three

- How does Plato's theory of explanation differ from the Atomists?
- According to Plato, what is the nature of The Good?
- Describe what Plato suggests is the process of gaining a relationship with The Good.
- What are the steps along the "divided line" that bring us to knowledge?
- How does the Allegory of the Cave illustrate Plato's theory of knowledge?
- Why does Plato's theory of universals necessitate a rationalist approach to proof?
- What is unique in Socrates' approach to the question of virtue?
- Why does Socrates believe that no man can truly harm another?
- How does Socrates' approach deny the possibility of conscious evil?
- What are some implications of Plato's tripartite view of the soul?
- How do the different types of men embody different virtues?
- Describe some of the effects of Plato's ethical views on subsequent trends in Western culture.
- What is the main question for Plato in any political regime?
- What is the organic theory of the state?

Lecture Four

- What are the basic philosophic positions of the two schools of philosophy so far?
- What is Aristotle's main objection to the Platonic theory of Forms?
- Why is Aristotle considered a "realist" in his approach to the one in the many?
- What is implied by Aristotle's argument for the basis of knowledge?
- How is Aristotle's theory of explanation different from Plato's?
- Explain Aristotle's theory of definitions by giving three unique examples of a proper definition.
- What are axioms, according to Aristotle, and how do we grasp them?
- Explain how Aristotle accounts for change by describing in detail one example of change.

- What are the four causes?
- Provide an example of the four causes at work in a simple unique example.

Lecture Five

- How does the account of four causes of change apply to human beings?
- Why is Aristotle's teleology unable to deal with all kinds of change? How does this impact the understanding of accidents?
- Using the doctrine of form and matter, explain how the Prime Mover is essential to Aristotle's view of change.
- What is Aristotle's unique perspective on the paradoxes of Zeno?
- Contrast Aristotle's vision of the "psyche" to that of Plato.
- How does Aristotle answer the skeptics on the evidence of the senses?
- What method does Aristotle use to arrive at ethical principles?
- What are the preconditions Aristotle gives for a theory of the ultimate good? What does he think that good is?
- What differentiates the two types of reason according to Aristotle? What are each type's characteristic virtues?
- Why does Dr. Peikoff think that Aristotle's ethics contains an error since it came before the Industrial Revolution?
- What is Aristotle's method for understanding the nature of the state?

Lecture Six

- What conditions in the world led to changes in how philosophers approached their task?
- How does Epicurus overcome his deterministic metaphysical views in ethics?
- What in human nature lays the foundation of Epicurean ethics?
- For Epicurus, what is the paradoxical relationship between desire and pleasure?
- How did the Stoic philosophers view the role of a god or gods in human life?
- Describe the consequence of separating values from virtues in the Stoics ethics.
- How did the Stoics view of politics make a lasting contribution to Western civilization?
- What are the limits of knowing according to Skeptics?
- Identify some legacies of skepticism in modern thought and culture.
- How did Plotinus translate Platonic forms into a religious context?

- Explain how Plotinus resolved the question of evil.
- How does the metaphysics of the One necessitate Plotinus's ethical approach?
- What role did the mystery religions of the ancient world play in philosophic change?

Lecture Seven

- What contributions did the early Christian figures have on the rise of philosophy?
- Where does Augustine follow and depart from Plato in his theory of knowledge?
- What elements of Greek philosophy remained in Augustine's view of the primacy of faith?
- How does Augustine derive his unique Christian determinism?
- Explain Augustine's answer to the problem of evil.
- What is the most important element in Augustine's ethical system?
- What mixed elements of Greek and pagan views remained in Augustine's Christian ethics?
- How did Augustine's theory of history influence modern philosophers?
- What were the main philosophic issues confronted by the Scholastics?
- What is the ontological argument for God?
- How does Aquinas distinguish between and reconcile faith and reason?
- According to Aquinas, how do humans come to a knowledge of the laws of logic?

Lecture Eight

- How does Aquinas reconcile the existence of God and this world?
- Give a brief account of the five arguments from natural theology for the existence of God.
- What are the natural virtues for Aquinas? The theological virtues?
- What key points from Aquinas led philosophy to advance in the Renaissance?
- How did Duns Scotus and William of Occam lead to the sundering of theology from philosophy?
- How did the rediscovery of antiquity and Protestantism help lay the groundwork for modern philosophy?
- Give a brief account of unique philosophic views of Luther.
- How did Francis Bacon's views on epistemology set up modern science?
- What are the deepest philosophic roots of modern science?
- How does Machiavelli represent the modern scientific approach to politics?

Lecture Nine

- How does Hobbes arrive at his metaphysical materialism?
- Explain how Hobbes's empiricism leads to his nominalism.
- What is the causal theory of perception? The representative theory?
- How do nominalism and sensualism imply each other?
- Explain how Hobbes's view of man leads to his determinist ethics and authoritarian politics.
- What is the Cartesian method of doubt?
- What is Descartes's basis for certainty?
- Explain Descartes's unique proof of God.
- How does Descartes escape the problem of demonic deceit in his epistemology?
- What are the innate ideas according to Descartes?
- Explain Descartes's dualism in metaphysics.

Lecture Ten

- How did Spinoza push Cartesian rationalism to a more extreme form?
- What was Spinoza's unique proof of God in his metaphysics?
- Explain Spinoza's pantheism.
- How can Spinoza reconcile the seeming differences between mind and matter as a monist?
- How did Leibniz arrive at his theory of monads?
- What made Leibniz not a pure rationalist despite his extreme idealism?
- What are the two classes of truth in Leibniz's system?
- Explain Locke's three arguments against innate ideas.
- What are the sources of experience from which we can build our ideas?
- In addition to the sensory qualities, why do entities need a substratum according to Locke?
- Since Locke rejects direct perception of reality, how does he think we can know reality?
- What positive points are there in Locke's ethics and politics?

Lecture Eleven

- How does Berkeley reconcile empiricism with his deep religious belief?
- What is subjective idealism?
- Why does Berkeley collapse into pure idealism as a result of the appearance/reality distinction?

- What is Berkeley's answer to the primary/secondary quality distinction?
- How does Hume's commitment to empiricism lead to his nominalism?
- What is sensualism?
- What is the test of meaning that Hume proposes?
- How does Hume destroy the idea of valid sense perception?
- Why does Hume ultimately reject the idea of entities?
- How does Hume undermine the law of causality?
- Where does Hume's theory of meaning lead him to in ethics?

Lecture Twelve

- What is the connection between the question of sensory evidence and the question of consciousness?
- How does the law of identity apply to consciousness?
- Does the form of perception matter to the objectivity of sense perception?
- How do varying sense modalities provide the basis of higher conceptual knowledge?
- How does the Objectivist view differ from naive realism, critical realism, and subjective idealism?
- Where, metaphysically, does sensory information exist?
- What role do similarities and differences play in the classification of borderline cases?
- Explain the role of function in concept formation.
- When does optionality play a role in conceptual classification?
- What is the fallacy of the stolen concept?
- Why does fallibility not necessitate doubt?
- What role does validation play in overcoming fallibility?
- Explain the onus of proof principle and its implications.
- What is an arbitrary assertion?